

Kingsway Center Commercial Area  
St. Louis  
St. Louis County  
Missouri

HABS No. MO-60

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MO,  
96-SALV,  
133-

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
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Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

KINGSWAY CENTER COMMERCIAL AREA

LOCATION: Situated in the area generally bounded by Page Boulevard, Kingshighway Boulevard, Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard, and Euclid Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri

QUAD: Clayton, Missouri

UTM: A 15/738700/4282660  
B 15/738500/4282300  
C 15/738200/4282275  
D 15/738025/4282875

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1890-1906

PRESENT OWNER: Planned Industrial Expansion Authority  
of the City of St. Louis  
1300 Convention Plaza  
St. Louis, Missouri 63103

PRESENT USE: Currently all 26 parcels that were targeted for acquisition are vacant. It is anticipated that the site will be cleared in the spring of 1987 and subsequently marketed as a commercial site.

SIGNIFICANCE: The targeted properties within the Kingsway Center Commercial District are "locally significant for (their) architectural significance as an important representative illustration of neighborhood development and urban vernacular traditions in late nineteenth-century St. Louis".

HISTORIAN: Joseph M. Dixon, et al, Archaeological Survey, University of Missouri, St. Louis, Missouri, December, 1984

## Introduction

The Kingsway Center Commercial area is situated in US Grant #3033. It is generally bounded by MLK Drive on the north, Maple Avenue on the south, Euclid Avenue on the east, and Kingshighway on the west. In greater detail, the tract boundaries to the east begin at 4861 MLK Drive, trending north for half a block, then turning to parallel an alley between Aldine Place and MLK Drive. The line veers north at this point to include a single lot at the southwest intersection of Kingshighway and Aldine Place, swinging immediately back south along Kingshighway.

A narrow, mixed commercial and residential extension follows west and south at the intersection of MLK Drive and Kingshighway. This includes a half block wide strip which parallels the back of the alley along MLK Drive, to the west, culminating at Academy Avenue. The strip to the south parallels Kingshighway for approximately four city blocks, extending irregularly along the alley and private property boundaries, and finally ending at Maple Avenue. The western boundary separates a zone of light commercial activity from an internal residential suburb, built ca. the turn of the century.

From Maple Avenue and Kingshighway, the southern boundary of the project areas continues east along Maple to Aubert where it turns north for  $\frac{1}{4}$  block, then east, ultimately joining the eastern boundary at Euclid Avenue and turning north again. The latter boundary only digresses to the east of the street to encompass the two principal intersections located between Page Boulevard and MLK Drive. Current redevelopment plans propose to eliminate a row of commercial and residential buildings at each location, and to replace them with modern commercial establishments.

The proposed clearance area is a centrally located reversed "L" shaped tract, currently residential in character. It is bounded by Euclid Avenue to the east, Page Boulevard to the south, Aubert Avenue to the west, and the alley south of MLK Drive to the north. The proposed clearing of this one and a half city block for development purposes would enlarge an existing island of commercial building within the center of a predominantly residential area.

A limited light commercial district centered at MLK Drive and Kingshighway has long served the surrounding residential neighborhoods, including the Greater Tandy and/or Fountain Park areas (Community Development Agency 1976; Wayman 1978a:8). The Cable Railway depot was situated at the southwest corner of this intersection by 1888 (Compton & Co. 1888: Leaflet). When residential lots near the vicinity were first advertised, established transportation lines were strongly emphasized. By 1909, stores were constructed at strategic corner locations (Sanborn 1909 - 1932:Plate 5). The Sears and Roebuck store, located at 1408 Kingshighway, was constructed in 1928 and expanded in 1946 (Sanborn 1909:Vol 5), during a period when the general area experienced its greatest economic growth (ca. 1910 to 1940). Following the depression of the 1930s, the surrounding area experienced an economic decline. Private homeowners moved to newly developing suburbs further west and were replaced locally by a primarily younger, non-White population. Commercial development, which has occurred since the neighborhood was constructed, has concentrated along MLK Drive and Kingshighway. In 1954, the surrounding area was targeted by the West End Community Conference as an urban blight area (Wayman 1978a).

### Historical Background

The Kingsway Center Commercial tract, as currently defined, lies within US Grant #3033. This grant, confirmed by the Land Commissioners Board, encompassed a total of 680.56 acres. It was situated at the western edge of the Grand Prairie Common Field and included land between two grants laid out in the traditional French manner using narrow arpents. The asymmetric shape of Grant #3033 is still distinguishable on street maps.

During the early French and Spanish regime in the Upper Louisiana Territory, land was generally granted in contiguous lots and only in moderate quantities. Later, however, larger grants were made, motivated in part by the need to attract potential homesteaders, and in part because large profits were to be made in land speculation as American immigration increased. For these reasons, it is probable that the fairly large US Grant #3033 was issued in the later years of Spanish imperial control as influential French and Spanish merchants benefitted from these benevolent policies.

The land grant in which the Kingsway tract is situated was originally issued to James McKay, a noted St. Louis fur trader and explorer. In the late 1700s, he actively explored the Upper Missouri River contacting northern Indian tribes as an agent for the Missouri Trading Company. McKay was granted numerous tracts of land in and around St. Louis and St. Charles counties in exchange for services rendered. Grant #3033 was confirmed to McKay's heirs by the US Land Commission after the Louisiana Purchase (Dupre 1938).

The area surrounding the Grand Prairie Common Fields was largely rural in character until the mid-1870s. Only a few isolated country estates and farmsteads existed in the region. The primary thoroughfares utilized

during this stage of development included the north-south oriented Kingshighway which parallels Lay Avenue (now Euclid) and intersects St. Charles Rock Road (now MLK Drive). The latter route was first paved with planks but, because it was heavily travelled, was macadamized quite early. Within the current project boundaries, the name of this route was changed first to Easton (early 1888s) and then to Dr. Martin Luther King Drive in the late 1960s. Page Boulevard, in the southern portion of the project area, only extended to Taylor Avenue in the 1870s but, by the turn of the century, it traversed the Kingsway tract and a trolley line paralleled this route (Wayman 1978b:11).

One of the earliest communities established in the far western city limits was Elleardsville. This small community developed around the orchards and nursery operated by Charles M. Elleard, an amateur horticulturalist. By 1870, it was a fashionable suburb. The Four Mile House, located on MLK Drive (then St. Charles Rock Road), served as a way station between St. Louis and St. Charles. The Abbey Jockey and Trotting Club, which boasted a race track, was located near this community at Page, Whittier, Easton, and Taylor (Wayman 1978a:4; Compton and Dry 1875).

Between the early 1800s and 1876, St. Louis City boundaries gradually expanded and the residential and commercial districts spread steadily westward. Elleardsville and the surrounding area was annexed to the city in 1876. The area which supported Abbey race tract was subdivided in this year and developed as Evans Place. Shortly afterward, the St. Louis Jockey and Trotting Association established a second tract to the west, located at the southwest corner of Kingshighway and Easton. A review of Hopkins 1883 Atlas illustrates the race track and the surrounding terrain as rural in character with only a few frame structures in existence. The eastern side

of Kingshighway (within the modern limits of 1300 and 1400 block) supported numerous stable facilities, presumably catering to the race track. Some were, and still are, located on peripheral side streets; most were once located in the block where the Sears & Roebuck building now stands.

An early auctioneer's leaflet documents the progress of residential development near the Kingshighway/Easton intersection. Twenty eight residential lots were advertised by the Joseph T. Donovan Company and H.L. Corner & Company in a block bounded by Page Boulevard, Kingshighway, Minerva, and Academy Avenues. At this time, April 26, 1888, no structures had been completed. A major selling point for the district was its proximity to the West End Narrow Gauge Railway completed in 1876 by Erastus Wells (Primm 1981:363) and to the Franklin Avenue Cable Line which serviced the central market district in downtown St. Louis.

In general, the City of St. Louis enjoyed a period of rapid civic and private development during the early twentieth century. Efforts to formally organize this expansion resulted in gridding of city streets in 1917. Many existing streets were widened and paved. Fresh water and sewer line improvements were also undertaken, including the enclosure of the River Des Peres as a result of the 1923 Bond issue (St. Louis Planning Commission 1969:30). City-wide zoning was implemented, restricting the location and type of commercial, residential, and industrial developments (Primm 1981:445). Apartments and hotels were constructed along Lindell Avenue and in the West End (the Kingshighway area and sections further to the west), "Subdivision activities took place with renewed vigor during the twenties absorbing many of the remaining large vacant areas in the extreme southern, southwestern and northwestern parts of the City" (St. Louis Planning Commission 1969:31). The depression of the 1930s dramatically slowed this

flourish of development, almost totally suspending new construction within the city limits (Primm 1981:472). An 1899 plat map demonstrates that rapid residential and minor commercial development occurred since the 1880s (Hopkins 1883:Plate 39). This urban growth was undoubtedly facilitated by the presence of transportation facilities.

Also possibly contributing to local neighborhood growth was the presence of Christian Brothers College. The college site was selected by Brother James, the president between 1870-1884, in 1871. Altogether, the site covered 30 acres, 21 of which were purchased from James H. Lucas (Archambeault 1946:30 -33). The building was constructed by 1872 and the college enjoyed excellent facilities and location. It was located adjacent to the current project area, at the northeast corner of the intersection of MLK Drive and Kingshighway.

This institution served as a landmark and, although the specific relationship between the college and the local neighborhood is not clear, it may have served as a catalyst. Several reasons are proposed to support this hypothesis. First, labor and materials for initial construction and subsequent supply of the institution could have come from the surrounding area. Second, the establishment of the institution brought additional people into the local area. Next, the building had a 125 ft. roof and was situated on an elevated ridge, thus providing a panoramic view of the city.

Tourists often climbed to this height for the view (Sunday Watchman 1907). Finally, the college was situated just 4 miles from Union Station, along one of the trolley lines linking the city together, and was easily accessible. While the college has been described as a community itself, it is possible that interaction with the surrounding neighborhood was not uncommon.



In the late 1800s and early 1900s, areas east and south of the college grounds were being subdivided into residential lots. Cote Brilliante to the north of the Kingsway tract was first platted in 1853, but it was not until after the Civil War that it began to expand. Fountain Park (ca. 1910) to the south-southeast and Elleardsville (ca. 1870) to the east were established. To the immediate west of the proposed Kingsway tract, and comprising part of it, is the Lucas and Hunt Addition established ca. 1883. It is unclear if the Kingsway tract was an integral part of the Cote Brilliante or Fountain Park suburbs. Smaller project encompassing only one or two blocks included the Harrington, Alex Marshall, Page Avenue, and W.H. Walters subdivisions. The character immediately within the vicinity of the project area was residential, with local commercial establishments centered at intersections or along Easton Avenue, and to a lesser degree on Page Boulevard. Approximately one third of the lots remained undeveloped at the turn of the century.

#### Local Development

##### Residential

By 1909, the Kingsway area was largely built-up and the remaining vacant lots were occupied (Sanborn 1909:Vol 5). Most of the apartment complexes were built locally during this phase of development. The bulk of the existing buildings continued to be residential, interspersed with commercial establishments along the main through streets and intersections (primarily Kingshighway, Page and Easton). The external appearances of pre-1899 corner structures were commercial on the first level, with multi-residential units on the second. Examples still exist at MLK Drive and the corners of Euclid, Aubert, and Academy Avenues. The former two structures have cast iron facades. Buildings of similar construction were added

to the neighborhood by 1909. One was built at the corner of Maple and Aubert, and three at Page and Euclid. The later variety buildings had cast iron corner posts as well as fronts.

At the time the area was being constructed, the Queen Anne architectural style was in vogue and this influence is apparent in extant residential structures. This style was also adapted to many of the corner commercial facades. Romanesque revival and classic influences continued in evidence. In those structures added after ca. 1905, the classic revival style, popular in other portions of the country, was manifest in many buildings in this tract.

The primary building medium by the turn of the century was brick, and this continued to be utilized with few exceptions. Large brick manufacturers, centered in southwest St. Louis, provided an easily accessible, inexpensive source of construction material. In those instances where buildings were later refaced, locally available limestone was frequently selected.

#### Commercial

By the 1920s, local construction was generally commercial in nature and occurred primarily along MLK Drive and Kingshighway. This renewed development resulted in the refacing of many of the existing buildings and joining of adjacent structures into a single facade. The main block of the Sears and Roebuck store, situated at 1403 N. Kingshighway, was built in 1928, attesting to the growing emphasis on local commercial development along major corridors. In the 1930s, when a nationwide depression occurred, construction within the city limits was virtually suspended (Primm 1981:472). Undoubtedly, the Kingsway area also experienced this economic stress. By the mid-1940s, development had resumed. The Sears retail store

was expanded in 1948, when large additions were added to the north and south ends of the original building. During this period, improvements made within the neighborhood were again primarily commercial and were focused along major streets and intersections. More recent construction within the Kingsway Center Commercial tract is represented by additions such as a Wendy's food chain restaurant (1980s), Shell garage, the Broad-Dugan Industrial Complex, and Christ Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church (1945), to name a few.

#### Institutional

Among the early institutions located tangential to the Kingsway Center Commercial tract was the Christian Brothers college. This private educational institution was once located on the property which is now maintained as Sherman Park. This Catholic school was established between 1875 and 1883 (Compton and Dry 1875; Hopkins 1883). Based on the maps reviewed, the institution existed prior to the major construction boom of the turn of the century. In fact, it is possible that the college may have served as a community focal point. In 1916, the college building burned and was never replaced. The property was finally sold in 1917 (Browman 1984, Personal Communication).

#### Religious

The local neighborhood churches have frequently changed names and locations within the Kingsway area over the years of commercial and residential development. As the social fabric of the area shifted, community needs also changed. In the mid 1870s, the area was a fashionable rural suburb of an upper income level. By the turn of the century most of the early country estates had been subdivided and platted into close city lots, gradually becoming urban in character. The local ethnic population was first

dominated by German and Irish neighborhoods, and later by Black communities.

The Kingsway tract is situated west of the St. Louis area known locally as the Ville. In the early 1900s, restrictive neighborhood statutory covenants were enacted in much of the city, except the Ville. While this practice was quickly found unconstitutional, in reality it continued to occur. As a result, the Black population began to cluster in the Ville area where it was possible for individual families to purchase property. Here, segregated schools ranging from kindergarten through the secondary levels were available.

Beginning in the 1950s, a noticeable outward shift of both Black and White populations from the inner city occurred. Once privately owned residential property reverted to low income housing. The Ville, now referred to as the Greater Tandy area, still supports a predominantly black population.

Among the first churches established near the Kingsway region was the Immanuel German Evangelical Church or Immanuel United Church of Christ (Wayman 1978:24) situated at 1231 Euclid Avenue. This congregation remained in the building at the intersection of Maple and Euclid until at least 1918. Like many of the churches in the area, the name and membership of the institution shifted with population changes. In 1919, the building housed a Baptist Church; by 1925, it was occupied by the Euclid Church of the Nazarene. Reference to a church at this location disappeared from the city directories in 1927; presumably the area is still vacant. The building which once housed these diverse congregations is situated just beyond the Kingsway Center Commercial tract, but undoubtedly contributed to the neighborhood development as a whole.

A second Baptist church once existed at the southeast corner of Euclid Avenue and Page Boulevard. Again this structure is tangential to the current project boundaries. This institution was last listed in the Polk/Gould city directories in 1920. Today, that portion of the lot which supported the church is vacant.

A Presbyterian church was once located at the corner of Page Boulevard and Aubert Avenue (Wayman 1978:24). The original residential buildings dated to the early 1900s still exist at the northeast and southeast corners of this intersection, so presumably the church was situated at one of the opposing lots. The congregation was referred to as the Brank Memorial Church. Little information concerning this church is known.

The Chesed Emeth synagogue moved to the Kingsway area in 1921. Prior to this it was located at Olive Street Road and was in existence in the late 1890s (Hyde and Conard 1899:339). A cemetery referred to as Chesed Shel Emeth, possibly associated with this group, was located 8 miles out from the (city?) courthouse. It is unclear where the synagogue was located before the move to the 1260 Page Boulevard address.

#### Historic Persons/Events

A review of St. Louis histories, cultural resource management studies and community development reports did not indicate that any widely known or significant historic events were associated with the Kingsway Center Commercial tract. Because the area now is principally a Black neighborhood, and because Aldine Place was a high status addresss during the second quarter of this century for Black professionals, a review of predominant Black individuals was made. Research revealed one local individual recognized as a Black leader, Edward D. Hamilton, a teacher. His residence,

1118 Aubert Avenue, however, is not within the area scheduled for redevelopment and will not be threatened by construction related impact.